

Three diocesan parishes taking part in PWRDF refugee sponsorship program

By Caroline Fitzpatrick

A challenge was issued by the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) two years ago to mark and celebrate the organization's 50th anniversary. Parishes were invited to sponsor 50 refugee families. As an encouragement, PWRDF offered to contribute an amount of money to the sponsoring group, an amount with which they arranged a matching grant from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The amount varies depending on the size of the sponsored family and is designed to encourage sponsorships and to help defray the costs of being financially responsible for a family for one year.

At the time of writing this article there have been 42 confirmed sponsorships. A few parishes are also awaiting refugee profiles to be provided by CIC. The refugees are from Colombia, Burma, Eritrea, Sudan, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Dominican Republic, Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Iran, Ethiopia and Afghanistan. Fourteen dioceses have participated thus far, Ottawa being one of them. Three sponsorships have been undertaken in this diocese, two by Refuge Now, an ecumenical grouping of five churches three of which are Anglican and two United, and one by a Kanata Stittsville Refugee Sponsorship Group (KSRSG) with six churches, three Anglican, two United and one Presbyterian. KSRSG sponsored a Karen family of four from Burma who arrived in February. Refuge NOW also sponsored a Karen family of four in 2009 – who are now well settled into their new life here – and a Kachin family, from northern Burma, who arrived in April. The Karen community in Ottawa is thriving, its members contributing much to the fabric of the city.

Those parishes that may be interested in this form of ministry should know that the rewards far exceed the outlay of time and money, and that it is a task which can well be undertaken ecumenically, thus involving and educating a larger number of people about the continuing and, unfortunately, by no means diminishing plight of millions of refugees throughout the world. It is often mentioned by Christians involved in refugee work that Christ himself was a refugee and that he urged his followers to welcome strangers. The value of the opportunity to help those in genuine need and to meet and learn to love people of different cultures, backgrounds and life experiences cannot be underestimated. Like so many other endeavours where one helps others, the work is very gratifying. What we do together in faith and love makes a world of difference in the lives of people in need.

The diocesan Refugee Working Group (DRWG) can provide names and information about refugees needing sponsorship and also offer advice and help in the planning and preparation for a sponsorship.

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